

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: The Sisterhood Is Alive and Well at Spelman College:

A Feminist Standpoint Case Study

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American women in the 21st century have more options from which to select a college education than in the past, yet there are some women who purposely select a women's college. This study examined the culture of women's colleges, specifically Spelman College, a Historically Black Women's College (HBWC) in Atlanta, Georgia, founded by White missionaries in 1881. As the literature surrounding women's education and Black women's education is sparse, this study adds a deeper exploration of Spelman's contribution and experiences of its alumna to the existing research. This qualitative research single-bound case study answered the research questions: (1) What are the components that shape Spelman's institutional culture, and (2) What makes it a unique learning space for Black women? Data was collected through archival research at Spelman College and the interviews of 13 Spelman alumna (who graduated between 1969 and 2012). Examination of the archival data and thematic analysis of the participant's narratives revealed sisterhood to be the powerful aspect of Spelman's institutional culture. However, intertwined within the sisterhood are themes of ritual and traditions, values, and historical racial and gender issues. The findings further revealed that the alumna viewed their undergraduate experience as positive, citing academic excellence as a

norm, a nurturing environment designed for the historically marginalized Black woman, mentoring, freedom of expression, and freedom to lead as other aspects of their holistic experience. Researchers and students interested in single-gender education and feminist and Black feminist theorists may find the study's conclusions useful as well as educators in the secondary and higher education arena.